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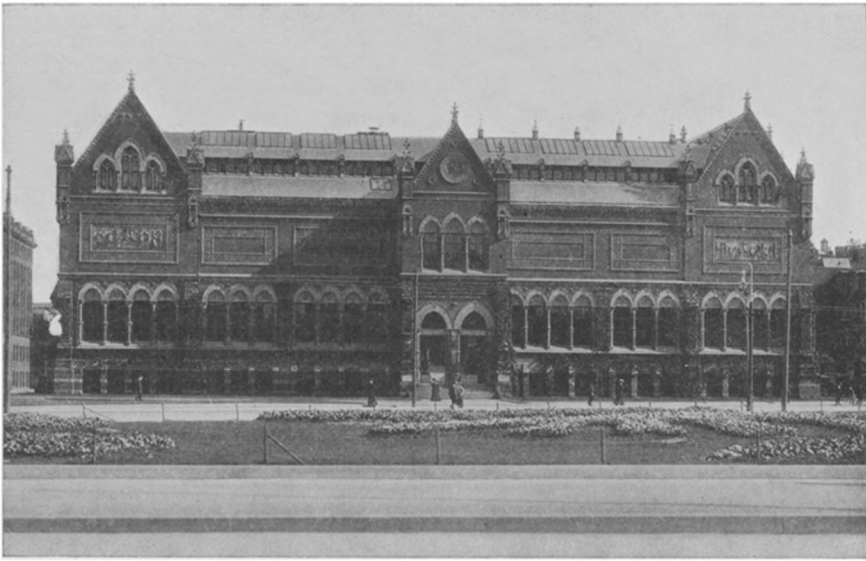
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The Present Museum from Copley Square

The Copley Square Museum

Opened July 3, 1876; to be closed May 1, 1909

WITH the closing of the present Museum, a building carefully and admirably constructed for a special purpose will be surrendered to other uses after but a third of a century of life. Wasteful though the change be, it is not a subject for regret. No one could have foreseen or would have wished to check the advances that have made it necessary. The prime need of a museum is space, — as well for protection against fire, dust, and noise as for light and for expansion; and adequate space is no longer at command on the present site, owing to the rapid growth of both the Museum and the city.

Another circumstance would of itself have ultimately compelled the Museum to seek another home. Since the building was conceived Copley Square has been created and has thrown the plan of the structure out of adjustment with its surroundings. The present Museum is one lateral half of a symmetrical design fronting on Dartmouth Street and presenting its flank to what is now Copley Square. The site was at one time thought of for a public park, and in 1869 had been occupied by the temporary Coliseum erected for the Peace Jubilee. In 1878, two years after the Museum was opened, a hotel was planned on the large triangle now forming most of Copley Square. When Trinity was dedicated in 1877, its incomplete façade fronted a narrow place on which, directly opposite the church door, ground was broken in 1884 for an apartment house. This structure would have masked the Museum also, which, like Trinity, was expected to be seen at the junction of two streets. The existing entrance of the Museum is a side door inadequate to its present

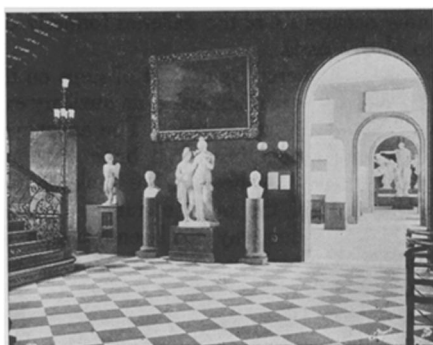
use both in appearance and because it lacks direct connection with the centre of the ultimate structure. From such a makeshift adaptation to new conditions a permanently satisfactory building could not be hoped for.

This should be remembered in justice to the design and to John H. Sturgis, first architect of the Museum. The interest of the building is acknowledged, and its clear expression of an exceptional aim is accounted a cardinal merit. The criticisms it has encountered refer not to the disposition and proportion of masses and openings, but to the quantity, quality, and color of the terra-cotta ornament. This was made in England in a fashion not now in favor. It has, moreover, not withstood our climate, the frosts of every winter since contributing their share to what has been called the "deciduous foliage" of the Museum. By 1888 faith in the architectural possibilities of terra cotta had waned, and the Dartmouth Street and Trinity Place extensions of the building, designed by the same architect and carried out by his successors, are bare of any. The propriety of the original attempt to give external warmth and attraction to a building dedicated to thoughtful pleasure is incontestable, its incomplete success involving only the means used. The accompanying illustrations clearly show that, apart from the character and color of its ornament, the Copley Square side of the Museum has worthily sustained its unexpected role as a façade.

The spirit of the design is that of North Italian Gothic in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Blank walls between spaces pierced with many openings are characteristic of this time and place. (Palazzo Comunale, Perugia). The grouping of the windows on the upper stories and their arrangement in rows on the lower ingeniously adapt to museum purposes a marked feature of the style



Trinity Place Corner



Entrance Hall



Egyptian Room



Greek Sculpture



Gem Room



Classical Corridor



Italian Renaissance Room

chosen (Palazzo Pubblico and Palazzo Grottanelli, Siena). Three gables crown the front (Siena Cathedral), supplemented by another at the side, all springing from tourelles supported on consols (Santa Maria della Spina, Pisa). The ornament in terra cotta was thought at the time the crowning contribution of the chosen style (Ospedale Maggiore, Milan). Had this decoration retained its vogue, and had either the buff or red of the tiles, or the gray of the basement granite, been used with the brick to the exclusion of the other colors, the building might have been prized as Trinity is, or the Library.

The first subscription for the Museum, opened at a public meeting in Music Hall February 3, 1871, delayed by the Chicago fire of 1871, the Boston fire of 1872, and the financial panic of 1873, reached in 1876 the sum of \$261,000. The original building, begun in 1871 and opened July 3, 1876, comprised the western half of the present front and the foundations and basement of the eastern half. During the spring of 1878 a subscription for the completion of the front yielded in a few months \$126,000. Work began in April of that year and continued until the following June, when the Museum was closed for rearrangement, opening again July 1, 1879. In 1886 the growth of the collections, by gift, purchase, and deposit, made a further extension imperative, and funds, amounting in 1888 to \$250,000, were gathered for the addition of lateral wings and a connecting corridor. These were completed during 1888 and 1889, the Museum closing for rearrangement December 23, 1889, and reopening as it now stands on March 18, 1890.

The structure measures 210 feet on Copley Square and 154 feet on the neighboring streets, occupying approximately half of a plot 360 by 250 feet, bounded on all four sides by public ways, from three of which the building stands somewhat back. The total area of the property is 94,900 square feet; the area built over, 32,348 square feet, of which the interior courtyard, 64x86 feet, occupies 5,418 square feet. The building is about 55 feet to the external cornice and about 80 feet to the highest ridge. The interior height of the basement, occupied by administration rooms and the library, is 11 feet, only half of this above ground on the exterior. On the first gallery floor, occupied by the Classical and Egyptian collections and by plaster reproductions of sculpture, the height of the smaller rooms and the corridor is 18 feet, of the larger, 21 feet. The external galleries are 32 feet wide, the largest twice that length. The interior rooms, nearly filling three sides of the courtyard, are 24 feet wide. On the second gallery floor, occupied by pictures and prints, collections of other European art, and the Chinese and Japanese collections, the interior height of the smaller side-lighted rooms is 18, of the larger and the corridor, 20 feet; of the smaller top-lighted galleries and the hall, 24, of the larger, 28 feet. The attic over the side-

lighted galleries has been devoted to studios, to store-rooms and to the ventilating fans, from which much was expected, but which after a trial went permanently out of use.

The rearrangement of the gallery floors resulting from the two extensions of the building has been progressive. Classical casts, Egyptian objects, and porcelain and pottery still retain positions given them in the original building of 1876; textiles, engravings and paintings, positions given them in the completed front of 1879. The extensions round the court in 1890 gave room on the first floor for a greatly enlarged exhibit of reproductions of sculpture, and on the second, for the extension of the picture galleries and for the newly formed Japanese Department. Since then the only important change of arrangement has resulted from the acquisition of original objects of Egyptian and Classical Art, which now occupy six of the galleries formerly devoted to plaster casts.

The doorway entered by a flight of steps on the Trinity Place front was designed as an auxiliary exit, and has almost never been used. The assignment of the basement spaces has often been changed. For years the coal for heating the building was delivered in front of the main entrance, a strange provision had this doorway not been planned for subordinate, and perhaps only temporary, use. Rooms adjoining the courtyard entrance, assigned to the reception and registry of acquisitions, were never found fully available for this purpose. The principle is correct and has been applied again, with needed modifications, in the new building.

The foundations of the building rest on piling driven through to the clay. The outside walls average about two and a half feet thick, and are provided with an air space, which for the most part has efficiently guarded the interior surface from dampness. Safety from fire within the building was insured by brick partitions, floors of concrete on steel beams, and plastering on wire lath. Only the flooring on the concrete, the doors and window frames are of wood. In thirty years two fires have started, one in a closed attic, where a fragment of cotton waste smouldered on a concrete floor, the other in the basement, where a carelessly thrown match charred two boards without itself being consumed. The menace from fire has come not from within but without the building. Just before the fortunate rain which helped confine the fire of 1898 in the Technology building, diagonally across Trinity Place, to the upper floor, the heat in the nearest gallery was unbearable twenty feet back from the windows. A few moments more and the glass in skylights and windows must have cracked and exposed the contents of that side of the Museum to injury or destruction by breakage, smoke, dust, and heat, if not fire itself.

This narrow escape and the progressive darkening of the lateral galleries by the erection of one overshadowing building after another, first made removal a serious question. For museum purposes



Dartmouth Street Corner



Upper Hall



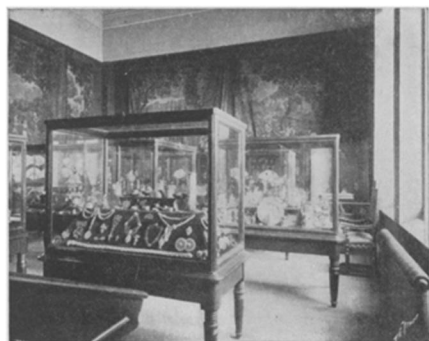
Allston Room



First Print Room



Textile Gallery



Coin Room



Japanese Room

the portion of sky cut off by the upper stories of high buildings is the most valuable source of light. Rays from the zenith do not enter a window and horizon light is obscured and tinted by smoke and haze. The façade which takes the place of this intermediate patch of sky also dims and colors the light it reflects. Of what avail to spend a princely endowment in gathering works of art if they are to be housed in galleries where they can never be properly seen? Other experience had already enforced this lesson. On building the wings the Copley Square design had been modified, both on the exterior and interior, in the interest of better lighting. In the new skylight an opaque apex replaced the glaring area of continuous glass used over the northern galleries, but did not obviate the necessity of shades. The new walls about the courtyard were crowded with windows and faced with cream colored instead of red brick. Nevertheless, the light of the interior galleries, especially on the first floor and in the angles, never proved satisfactory. The demonstrated impossibility of lighting rooms adequately for museum purposes from a restricted courtyard added a final reason for renouncing any further attempt to utilize the present site.

Many misgivings have been felt about leaving it. Copley Square has become one of the centres of the city, incorporating in a group of monumental buildings all the intellectual and spiritual interests for which Boston chiefly stands. The galleries of the Museum have proved a congenial home for the treasures they shelter. Their proportions and lack of ornament have been criticised, but their arrangement and moderate size have been commended, and they are judicious and varied in design. The way through them is easy to find, and the suite of inner rooms affords an alternative path and offers the retirement and quiet most favorable to the intelligent use of the eyes. In former years a thicket of rhododendrons in the courtyard added the note of natural beauty.

The memories of the building have also their appeal, though for a passing generation only. The story told by Dr. Samuel Eliot at the opening of the building in 1876 recurs to the mind as it closes. A Paduan monk, last of his brotherhood, showing the poet Rogers an ancient painting, said: "We are the shadows; these remain." The Museum was the child of the Athenæum, and its care and shelter there was a labor of love, on the part especially of Martin Brimmer, Charles C. Perkins, and Charles G. Loring, until, in 1876, a separate building demanded an administrative staff. The early division of the collections into departments under independent management had two important results, ensuring the trained care and interpretation of each and paving the way for their structural separation in the new building into the museums within a museum now believed the most fruitful to the visitor. The hospitality offered by the Trustees from the first to independent and unorganized technical instruction in drawing, painting, carving, needle-

work, pottery, and other branches, eventually led to the establishment under Museum auspices of a school of painting, sculpture, and design, whose instructors and graduates have won it honor, and to which the Museum has now formally entrusted the technical side of its educational work. The statue of the "Falling Gladiator" now shown in the Museum, the work of Dr. William Rimmer, instructor in artistic anatomy until his death in 1879, was called by a fellow sculptor twenty years ago the only *statue* in America except the "Jefferson" of David d'Angers in the Capitol. With growing means and a larger staff, the Museum could finally offer its own active instruction, at first to the few pursuing historical studies, more recently to many anxious to obtain whatever our works of art have to give. It remains to apply these later methods persistently and on a liberal scale to the great mass of those the Museum serves. Facilities of admission — more free days and evening opening — do not suffice. Moreover, as to the latter, a museum is a daylight resort. Its contents are the product of days and not of nights of labor, and demand to be seen in the sunlight. They are, furthermore, better apprehended in holiday leisure apart from the preoccupations of a hurried working day. The Museum was early provided with artificial light, at first gas, then electricity, the casts especially gaining life and beauty at night. But by reason of the cost, evening openings have always been exceptional occasions, — some of them sources of legend, like the Artists' Festival of 1889, with its orchestra and chorus, its veritable costumes, its draperies and flowers.

Among the memories of the building are some of accident, some even of tragedy; but, to the honor of the city, none of serious vandalism. The Sunday visitors especially represent the American public at its best. All sorts and conditions of men contribute their quota to the well-behaved, interested, almost reverent throng.

The two large panels in relief on the front of the building are labelled respectively "The Genius of Art" and "Art and Industry." In the western panel rays diverge from a central winged figure toward others standing against an architectural background, as representatives of the art of various



*The first home of the Museum collections
Athenæum Galleries, 1872*

From a painting by E. Meneghelli

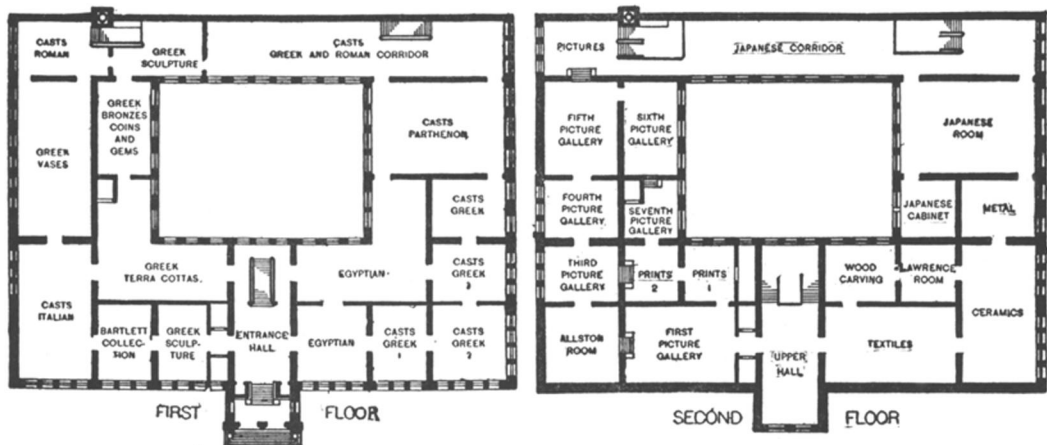
nations. In the eastern panel two figures are similarly placed between groups representing respectively the arts and the industries. These two panels symbolize the two motives, artistic and industrial, which have been historically concerned in the establishment of public collections of fine art. Museums first gathered beautiful things as treasures to preserve; later, and only very recently, as models to imitate. The first impulse, as eternal and irresistible as beauty itself, has been overshadowed of late by the other only through a sporadic and disputable faith in eclecticism and in the possibility of creating a demand for imaginative work by creating a supply of it. Museums as treasures already flourished under Hellenistic kings; as collections of teaching material, they date only from the middle of the nineteenth century.

The richer museums have become, the more their artistic function has asserted its native pri-

macy. They are not now asking how they may aid technical workers. The experience of the past half century has abundantly taught them their strength and weakness in this service. The problem of the present is the democratization of museums: how they may help to give all men a share in the life of the imagination. Originating in a community already possessing works of art it was unwilling to let die, this Museum is notable for the order of its charter purposes: first, exhibition; second, instruction. Both the present building and its successor, with their galleries above and their work-rooms below, symbolize these aims in their proper subordination. Our Museum both belongs to the future and is true to its own past in providing duly for the instruction of those of special aptitudes and opportunities, while making its chief care the promotion of public interest in the arts it represents.

G.

Plans of the Galleries



The Egyptian Room, Lawrence Room, and Japanese Cabinet are closed. The Morse Collection has been removed from the Japanese Corridor. The Terra-cotta Room may be closed in advance of the closing of the building May 1.

Basement Plan



The Department offices are now closed to visitors. The removal of the Library to the new Museum has begun, but the reading room and photograph collection will remain open for the present.

Sunday Afternoon Talks During April

ON the last four Sunday afternoons in the present building, April 4, 11, 18 and 25, a series of half-hour talks will be given in the galleries on topics connected with objects shown. There will be two talks each afternoon, at 2.30 and 3.30. The galleries, subjects and speakers will be announced in the press and by a notice in the entrance hall.

The Museum is indebted to one of its friends for the means of pursuing this experiment, begun on Sunday afternoons during January, February, and March, last year.

Docent Service

DOCENT service will be discontinued during the final month in the present building. Mr. Rowe's time will be occupied in preparations for moving the collection of Egyptian art at present in his charge.